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ABSTRACT

Robert Morris College received a national Endowment for the Humanities grant to create a faculty study project to internationalize the humanities curriculum. The Humanities can play a role in building the cultural contexts and contributing to a deeper understanding of information-based corporate decision making in Information Systems courses, especially in decision support systems and management information systems courses. In a seminar format, a college professor pursued the construction of relationships between Chinese and Japanese concepts and the systems discussed in such courses. The seminar began with an expose of Gao Yuan's "Thirty Six Strategems" of ancient China, which are easily contrasted with the Confucian approach as read in the "Analects." These two very different cultural traditions can be viewed as a union of opposites or an application of the Yin and Yang strategies to decision making. Another perspective for decision making can be found in the Lao Tzu. When studied as a cultural insider, decision making is mysterious; to cultural outsiders, it seems as if it is impossible. Studies of decision making indicate that the decision maker's cognitive style is important in the design of decision support systems. The building of conceptual bridges from one culture to another is a difficult affair. (A chart indicating how the cultural traditions of the "Strategems" and the Confucian Way can be viewed and a table graphically indicating the relationship of the Confucian Way, the Strategems, and decision making are included.) (RS)

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Cultural Influences and Corporate Decision Making: The Humanities/ Information Systems Partnership

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Acknowledgement

This essay grew out of a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to create a faculty study project to internationalize the humanities curriculum at Robert Morris College. The project is developing a conceptual model of undergraduate curricular internationalization that can be applied by the professional disciplines within the College. Spearheaded by Dr. John Jarvis, Assistant Professor of Communications, the project aims to utilize textx, ideas, themes and issues from China and Japan to, among other goals, foster cross cultural appreciation in an increasingly interdependent world.

When I volunteered and was asked to join the NEH grant seminar, I was delighted. It would mean a reaquaintenance with some literature and concepts that I had not had the opportunity recently to read and study. I was also challenged by the goal of trying to apply, or create links between, the Humanities and the Professions.

My goal is to argue for the role of the Humanities in building the cultural contexts and in contributing to a deeper understanding of information-based corporate decision making in Information Systems courses, especially in Decision Support Systems and Management Information systems courses. In my special case, I would be pursuing the construction of relationships between Chinese and Japanese concepts and the field of Information Systems(Information Science), in particular Decision Support Systems, Decision Theory and Information Theory. Understanding Chinese and Japanese and Western decision making is evident when one compares how income statements are read.

Indeed, upon seeing an Income Statement a Chinese or Japanese business person and an American business person(of whatever ethnic decent) would read the same thing but, quite possibly, understand differently what the numbers mean. This difference stems from a difference in how problems are approached and solved. In the first meeting of the advisory board of the NEH grant seminar, I was struck by the use of proverbs by a certain gentleman(a teacher of the Chinese and Japanese languages to ground his explanations of cultural differences. In particular, I remember the saying he used from Book IV,12 of the Analects "If one is guided by profit in one's action, one will incur much ill will."

My goal has been to study how such sayings become rules of use or even strategies of behavior in the decision making process. I thought the above saying to be a significant one for anyone studying business. This is what triggered my pursuit of understanding how Humanities relate to DSS and Information Systems.

In my first presentation to the seminar, I sought to show that a different literary and cultural history might be more appropriate to helping me build the conceptual bridges between the two areas. So, I began with an expose of Gao Yuan's Thirty-Six Stratagems of ancient China. These stratagems are expressions of the Yin/Yang principles at work in the universe. Because these stratagems are expressive of conflict and so many examples were of war, they were viewed as a different lens to look at the decision making process. They are easily contrasted with the Confucian approach as read in the Analects. As the categories listed below indicate, they are quite different in tone. In fact, this caused me and members of the seminar some difficulty as I did not know

how to reconcile the two seemingly different cultural traditions of social behavior and interaction.

In this contrastive mood, I view the following chart as indicative of how these two cultural traditions can be seen as two different lenses by which to view decisions.

Two frameworks for viewing decision making.

Stratagems	Confucian Way
Superiority	Benevolence
Confrontation	Doing one's Best
Attack	Being Trustworthy
Confusion	Being Eager to learn
Acquisition	Being Flexible
Desperation	Being Action oriented
	Being observant of Rites

Yuan(1991): Lure the Tiger out of the Mountain

Superiority

A familiar sight provokes no attention.
He who knows the art of the direct and indirect approaches will be victorious.
Kill with a borrowed knife.
The female overcomes the male with stillness.
Loot a burning house.
Make a feint to the east while attacking in the west.

Confrontation

Create something out of nothing.
Pretend to take one path while sneaking down another.
Sit on the mountaintop and watch the tigers fight.
Conceal a dagger with a smile.
Sacrifice the plum tree fro the peach tree.
Take the opportunity to steal a goat.

Attack

Beat the grass to startle the snake.
Raise a corpse from the dead.
Lure the tiger out of the mountains.
Snag the enemy by letting him off the hook.
Cast a brick to attract jade.
Catch the ringleader to nab the bandits.

Confusion

Steal the firewood from under the cauldron.
Fish in troubled waters.
Slough off the cicada's shell.
Shut the door to catch the thief.
Befriend a distant state while attacking a neighbor.
Obtain safe passage to conquer the kingdom of Guo.

Acquisition

Replace the beams and pillars with rotten timber.
Point to the mulberry and curse the locust.
Play dumb while remaining smart.
Pull down the ladder after the ascent.
Deck the tree with bogus blossoms.
Make the host and the guest exchange places.

Desperation

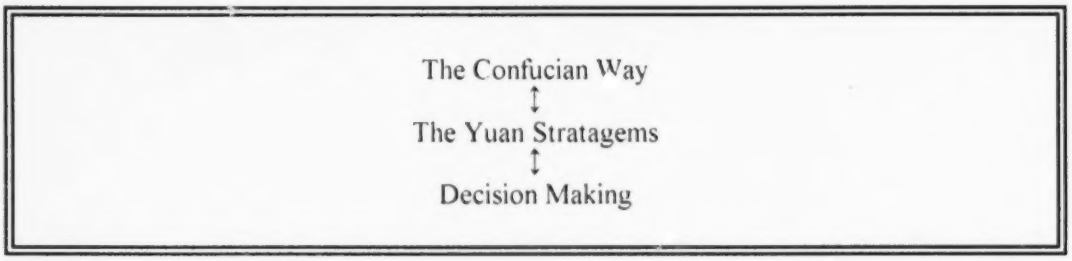
Use a woman to ensure a man.
Fling open the gates to the empty city.
Let the enemy's own spy sow discord in the enemy's camp.
Inflict injury on oneself to win the enemy's trust.
Chain together the enemy's warships.
Run away.

Confucius: The Analects

"Quick in action but cautious in speech. I.14.
"Puts his words into action before allowing his words to follow his actions." II.13.
"Observant of the rites." I.15.
"The asking of questions is in itself the correct rite." III.15.
"The gentleman is no vessel." II.12.
"To attack a task from the wrong end can do nothing but harm." II.16.
"If one is guided by profit in one's actions, one will incur much ill will." IV.12.

"The gentleman understands what is moral. The small man understands what is profitable.: IV.16.

However, I think that we can also view things actually as a union of opposites or an application of the Yin and Yang strategies. I see the Confucian Way as the Ying principle and the Stratagems as the Yin principle. Yuan says as much in his text when points out that the Chinese considered an sort of strategy creation as determined by the Yin because strategies are conceived in secret and in the dark. The Confucian Way represents the all inclusive valuing system that is(was) Chinese culture. The Yuan Stratagems are the methods of accomplishing these values; the stratagems are ways of embodiment in everyday behavior. The table below graphically indicates this.



So, at this point in time, we can see that a culture possesses multiple lenses by which events, objects, people, etc. or such processes as decision making can be viewed and indeed must be viewed.

From the Lao Tzu(Tao-te ching), we find another perspective for decision making.

> In order to contract. It is necessary first to expand.
>
> In order to weaken. It is necessary first to strengthen.
>
> In order to destroy. It is necessary first to promote.
>
> In order to grasp. It is necessary first to give.
>
> This is called subtle light. The weak and the tender overcome the hard and the strong. Fish should not be taken away from water. And sharp weapons of the state should not be displayed to the people.
>
> (Tao-te ching,36)

I am interested in decision making not because of the results obtainable through certain processes, but because decision making is a process. Perhaps, the most important part of this process are the frameworks with which decisions are reached. Among the frameworks are the cultural, social, psychological and philosophical. The latter encompasses all the frameworks mentioned, as well as the rhetorical and logical frameworks.

I am interested in the frameworks. Not merely the process. Not what making a good decision means. Not the outcomes of the process but the meanings that mold these states of affairs. That is, I am interested in the lenses, perspectives or symbols that structure the process and the outcomes. That is, I am interested in understanding the conceptions which situate and govern decision making.

I have made the following assumptions: 1) culture consists of the knowledge, belief systems, and behaviors everyone needs in order to live successfully in a society(Spradley,6-8); 2) different cultures are different ways of thinking and problem solving; 3) cultures are channels of different perceptual and conceptual constructs(Gladwin,29); 4) the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is functional; 5) the texts read and studied are representations of constructs of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors of those cultures of which they are products(even if read in translation).

Making decisions, especially business decisions, is a complex activity. "Decision making is a process of choosing among alternative courses of action for the purpose of attaining a goal or goals(Turban,32). The decision process consists of four stages: intelligence, design, choice, and implementation(Turban,32). When studied as a cultural insider, decision making is mysterious; when you are a cultural outsider, it seems as if it is impossible. The most complex, and thus the most interesting, are the decisions made that affect strategic outcomes. Usually, a decision maker relies on a policy or set of policies to guide the process and judgment. Policies are representations of values and positions. They are the ground or framework of making a judgment. Policies are the cultural constructs.

Decision Support Systems are informational systems having four aspects: 1) they incorporate data and models into one system; 2) they are designed to assign in dealing with semistructured or unstructured situations; 3) they support a manager's judgment; and 4) they improve decision making effectiveness. A Decision Support System is a computerized adjunct to the manager who is making the decisions(Turban,9).

Studies of decision making indicate that the decision maker's cognitive style is important in the design of Decision Support Systems. For mangers, some styles are detail oriented; some are abstractors; some are subjective(inner directed); some are objective(outer directed)(Mann et al.,118). Several categories of cognitive style have been isolated and studied for application to the design of DSS. These are cognitive complexity, consisting of the ability to differentiate, to discriminate, and to integrate(Mann et al.,119). Two other cognitive styles are field independence - dependence and thinking mode. The former refers to a person's abstracting ability or to a person's contextualizing ability; the latter to how systematic or how heuristically a person is in dealing with the search for problem solutions in data(Mann et al.,119).

Attributes of a "quality" decision are 1) knowledge of alternative choices and outcomes; 2) knowledge of needs fulfilled and values underlying a particular choice; 3) costs and benefits of a decision; 4) pursuit of complete information and knowledge; 5) awareness of subsequent information impacting on the decision; 6) review of all consequences of all alternative actions; and 7) planned alternative ways for implementation in minimize risk(Janis and Mann,11).

The building of conceptual bridges from one culture to another is a difficult affair. This is only a beginning.

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